



The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 63

JANUARY 8TH, 1941

DEAR MEMBER,

The air-force is one of the few fields in the national life in which youth has large responsibility and initiative. From the beginning of the war I have thought of the R.A.F., to which the country already owes so much, as a source from which influences might come which will help to regenerate our national life. It was, therefore, with special interest that I received from one of our members who is an officer in the R.A.F. the following statement which is the outcome of conversations with fellow-officers and members of the other services. It grew out of a sense that the war can be redeemed only if there can be brought out of it some positive good.

"The liberties we are now fighting to preserve are the result of deep spiritual stirrings that, from time to time, have marked stages in the slow and painful evolution of democracy.

Freedom released not only our bodies but our minds. It started us on our career of exploration and discovery, of ever deepening knowledge and widening horizons. It brought within our reach unimagined wealth.

Unhappily, disclosure of the fullness of the earth has made us, in many ways, more selfish rather than more generous; sharpened rather than dulled our instinct for acquisition, and for getting the better of our fellows. The glitter of gold, the luxury and power and privilege that gold can buy have led many of us to believe that gold is all that matters.

It is inevitable that a world ruled by such a belief should have its fruits spread unevenly among mankind, that its richness should often bring benefit to few rather than to many. The world is still a welter of conflicting interests, with man ranged against man and nation against nation. So it will continue, as long as self remains the overriding motive in personal and corporate relationships.

We do not need to look very far or very deep to see that there is much wrong in our present way of life. Change is obviously needed, if we are to free ourselves from conditions that make even peace a period of striving and unrest, of preparation for approaching war.

We must change the point of view that sees life as unending competition, the logical ultimate of which is strife; that accepts social and economic injustice as necessary and inescapable; that has one ethic for big business and government, and another, far more strict, for the individual. All these evils, and many more, must be swept ruthlessly away. We must discover and try out a completely new technique for the handling of our affairs.

The question is, what?

To find an answer we must keep before us certain facts including the following:

(i) We must put an end to reproducing patterns that have constantly recurred in human history and led only to disaster.

(ii) Plausible and brilliant 'issues' have been devised through the ages. They failed, because the spirit that alone can turn ideas to fact lay too far below perfection. It is spirit that matters, not form.

(iii) We can only marshal under our banners the elements of good still abroad in the world if we prove ourselves to be wholly on the side of good.

(iv) The English-speaking world must accept the burden of proving that the ordering of life in harmony with God is not only practical but profitable.

(v) A very close connection exists between democracy and eternal principles—principles that form the framework of Christianity and of every great revealed religion. Right, absolute right, can only become a practical and living issue in a community of free men. Without Truth

to regulate and guide, freedom becomes licence, a mere continuance of existing confusions or the opening up of new tyrannies.

(vi) The individual must be the ultimate basis of the new national and international way of life. He must therefore realise his individual responsibility, and see to it that he, and his community, exist strictly within the bounds of right, justice and consideration for others.

(vii) The key to the new order is leadership. We need men, and women, sufficiently wise, understanding and fearless to reflect eternal Truth.

(viii) The only true efficiency is that founded upon principles of right.

These facts point to our immediate task and give us a vision of the future.

We must at once declare ourselves uncompromisingly against every form of greed, carelessness and sloth; against the belief that we can only prosper at the cost of other men's prosperity. We must show ourselves willing to outlaw bigotry, intolerance and pride; to be inclusive rather than exclusive in our attitude to others; to establish principles of humanity, kindness and honesty in politics, government and business.

We must build this new technique upon the firm basis of public opinion, expressed, where needed, by statute.

We must prepare! for a new spiritual stirring within ourselves, to open our hearts to spiritual forces as powerful as those that inspired Cromwell's Ironsides. We must burn with as intense a zeal as do our enemies.

Above all, we must have leaders. Our people are more than ready to follow the kind of leadership they crave. We have the Ironsides, may we have our Cromwells and our Hampdens.

Let us pray that now, as in every other crisis in our history the leaders we need so badly in every section of our war effort, in every aspect of our national life, will emerge; that men, and women, will fearlessly stand up and, by the clarity of their own vision, lead the tortured world out of the darkness of destruction into a new era of creation and light."

RECONSTRUCTION

*The Round Table*¹ in its December issue, to which I referred last week, contains a striking article on Reconstruction. It starts from two basal facts. The first is that, whereas a year ago discussion centred on a world order or European order and schemes of Federal Union, today the centre of interest is a different Britain. That seems to me unquestionably the right approach. Something will certainly have to be done after the war in regard to a European order, but what the world needs today is not more theory and schemes but example. Moreover, reconstruction in Europe will of necessity be a slow business; reconstruction at home can begin at once.

The second fact is that throughout the country and in the most diverse circles there is manifest a growing resolve that British democracy shall be regenerated. This resolve is finding expression in characteristically British fashion. There is, on the one hand, an increasing readiness to examine the foundations of our society: "a temper so radical as to be almost revolutionary." On the other hand, there is no strong drift to the revolutionary parties either of the Right or of the Left. There is, on the contrary, a profound mistrust of all ideologies. The British people are recovering the excellences of their own tradition. "The policy they will support will be progressive, perhaps radically so, but it will be empirical."

This analysis is probably broadly true of the present situation. In so far as it is true, it is of the highest importance, and that it should continue to be true is the one hope of the future. But over against it has to be set the power of inertia in human affairs; things are always heavily weighted on the side of the status quo. Unless there is bold, creative action by a free democracy, the swift course of events may play into the hands of one or other of the revolutionary parties. Signs are not wanting of deep discontents which, if they are not met in time, may burst into flame.

The article goes on to insist, as was done in the Supplement to C.N.-L. No. 29, that reconstruction must be planned now or never. "It is not true that the opportunity will come when the victory is won; the opportunity will then disappear. Faction and disillusion have been the immediate fruits of every victory in history." In the last war

¹ Macmillan & Co. 5s. ; annual subscription 20s.

far the most important social legislation, such as the Fisher Education Act, was passed during the war, not in the years that followed. Moreover, plans for reconstruction at home are not an interference with the prosecution of the war; they are a necessary part of the grand strategy of victory, both at home and abroad. "If we can prove among our own people that democracy is a cause as bold and dynamic, as young and as forceful, as any tyrant's 'New Order,' we shall not have to coax allies to our standard."

The article then proceeds to ask to what *sorts* of reconstruction attention must be primarily directed. Three major fields are singled out for mention. First, there is the rebuilding of our devastated cities, streets and homes. The vital matter here is that the plans be sufficiently bold and imaginative; Lord Reith has a superb opportunity. Secondly, there is the immense human problem of fitting millions of men and women into peace-time employment. There must be a carefully thought-out campaign to control the post-war situation. Thirdly, the lessons of the war must be learned. No nation can undergo the strain of modern war without some weaknesses in its structure and organisation being exposed. Among these is the apparent failure of our educational system to train up a sufficient supply of men of ability to lead the nation. Another set of questions relates to our national industrial policy.

There are, of course, many other questions besides, such as the readjustment of town and country life—urgent in itself and forced on our attention by evacuation—and the new conception that is emerging of colonial responsibilities.

Finally, the question is raised of the organisation required to secure effective action. The article suggests the appointment of a small, but very carefully chosen, Commission, representing the unofficial as well as the official experience and thinking of the country, working through sub-commissions for each line of enquiry which would draw on the brains of a very wide range of men and women.

REMAKING BRITAIN NOW

If a new Britain is to grow out of the war, there is plainly a point at which we have to begin now. We cannot postpone provision for the victims of aerial bombardment. Public opinion needs to be roused about this to a much greater degree than it yet is.

The Times published recently two articles (in the issues of December 27th and 28th) describing the conditions of the night shelters in London. Many hundreds of thousands of people in East London alone are spending their nights—have been doing so for weeks and will continue to do so—in conditions that are intolerable for human beings. They are crowded into great basement vaults accommodating in some instances 5,000 or 6,000 people, or take refuge in hundreds under railway arches. All these refuges are makeshifts, many of them utterly unsuitable for human habitation. Damp is everywhere present and water often drips down the walls. The sanitary conditions are in many cases deplorable, the latrines insufficient and spreading foulness by their overflow. Even the shelters in which improvements have been made are without arrangements for washing. Efforts are being made to better the conditions; there is an immense amount of devoted service by officials and voluntary workers. But the improvement is intolerably slow. The danger of disease and epidemics is obvious. The loss of life from these causes may prove to be greater than from bombs.

Even if the worst indecencies are overcome and the indispensable minimum of comfort is achieved—which is in itself a herculean task—how long is it possible to tolerate the herding together of human beings in conditions in which are mingled indiscriminately old and young, healthy and diseased, cleanly and verminous, in which there is no privacy and no family life, and in which a normal human existence is almost impossible? Analogous conditions to those which exist in London are found in the other cities which have been heavily bombed. In these many people seek refuge in the country, sometimes to spend the night in the open fields.

These experiences show the extraordinary power of man to adapt himself to circumstances. But it must be remembered that this adaptation may be in either an upward or

a downward direction. People can settle down too easily to a lower standard of life. In the desire for physical safety they may reconcile themselves to squalor and degradation at a sub-human level. On the other hand, there is the heroic effort on the part of many to master the intolerable conditions and to find in them the opportunity of mutual help and of creating a new community. Here, as everywhere, there is going on the endless struggle between death and life, decay and growth, matter and spirit. This may prove to be the growing point of the national life at which the future destiny of Britain is being decided.

In this problem of ruined or menaced homes, which touches the lives of millions of our people, we have a searching test of the capacity of our country to meet the demands of total war. There is good-will in abundance, but individual and local efforts, however well-intentioned and sacrificial, are unable to cope with the magnitude of the emergency. The vital question is whether the nation is resilient enough, its social and economic organisation elastic enough, its heart big enough, to meet the shock. We are in danger of being forced into a course inimical to our real purpose. What we are in fact doing is to allow the cost of the war to fall unfairly on one section of our society. If we acquiesce in this, we cease to be a community waging the war with a common purpose. Such acquiescence is bound to impair our capacity to address ourselves to the task of reconstruction as a united people. It will mean that we succumb to the temptation of building castles in an imagined future as an escape from grappling with the real responsibilities of present existence. The realisation of our dreams for the future, which are our mainstay through the present ordeal, may depend on the energy and imagination with which we address ourselves now to meeting the urgent needs of the large section of the population which has been most severely hit by the war.

PARENTS AND RECONSTRUCTION

In the building of the national future none have a greater responsibility and opportunity than parents. I have had sent to me a stirring memorandum addressed to parents by the Parents Association on the subject of Civics.¹ It is a call to parents to unite in helping their children to become the makers of a better civilisation than the world has yet known. It is urged that this is possible only on the basis of the Christian faith and tradition, but that the Christian aim needs to be stated in a new way, so that it may seem to children more intelligible, more practical and more in keeping with the whole of life.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

¹ Obtainable from the Secretary, Miss W. M. Voigt, 37 Vine Lane, Hillingdon, Middlesex, 4d. post free.

Christmas Supplement—A few copies of the Christmas Supplement by the Archbishop of York entitled "Not in the News" are still available. Price 4d. each, post free.

Bound Volumes—Volume I (Nos. 0-26). Volume II (Nos. 27-52). Uniformly bound in green cloth with gold lettering and Index. 8s. 6d. each, post free.

Folders—Black rexine with "C.N.-L." in gold, to hold 26 Letters and Supplements. 2s. post free.

Subscriptions—The rate of subscriptions to the News-Letter is 12s. 6d. (\$3.0 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year, and 6s. 6d. (\$1.50 in U.S.A. and Canada) for six months, and 3s. 6d. for three months.

All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, ARLOSH HALL, MANSFIELD ROAD, OXFORD.